

ERNEST F. HOLLINGS
SOUTH CAROLINA

OFFICES:

1835 ASSEMBLY STREET
COLUMBIA, SC 29201
803-765-5731

126 FEDERAL BUILDING
GREENVILLE, SC 29603
864-233-5366

112 CUSTOM HOUSE
200 EAST BAY STREET
CHARLESTON, SC 29401
843-727-4525

United States Senate

125 RUSSELL OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4002
202-224-6121

EMAIL: <http://hollings.senate.gov>

COMMITTEES:

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION: RANKING

APPROPRIATIONS
COMMERCE, JUSTICE, STATE AND
THE JUDICIARY: RANKING
DEFENSE
LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
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INTERIOR

BUDGET

DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

September 8, 2003

CARES Commission
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420-0001

Dear Commission Members:

Welcome to Charleston. I regret that the Senate schedule prevents me from personally meeting with you today, but I wanted to take this opportunity to share my thoughts on how we can best provide health care to veterans in South Carolina and other parts of the country.

As you know, South Carolina is home to more veterans per capita than any other state in the United States. These veterans depend on two VA inpatient facilities and eight VA outpatients clinics that struggle to meet the demand for their services. I believe we need additional primary care clinics in South Carolina, geographically disbursed across the state. This will promote more efficient care by providing a community-based medical home to patients and alleviate the pressure on the inpatient facilities to provide primary and preventive care services better suited to local clinics.

I also believe the Department of Veterans Affairs must maintain a strong affiliation with our nation's academic health centers. As you will see in Charleston, the expertise and resources provided by the faculty and staff of the Medical University of South Carolina are critical to the successful operation of the Johnson Medical Center. Likewise, the Medical University benefits from the relationship with the VA by providing their students with exposure to the veteran population. During your deliberations, I strongly encourage you to explore avenues to strengthen and streamline the relationships between the VA and academic health centers like MUSC.

I also encourage you to recommend methods for the VA and academic health centers to jointly develop facilities and land. As you will see during your visit, the

facilities housing both the MUSC Hospital and the Johnson Medical Center are nearing the end of their lifespan. Given the budgetary constraints present at the federal, state and local lever, it makes no sense to construct two new government hospitals within such close proximity to one another. I support the discussions underway between the VA and the Medical University to jointly develop facilities and land under an enhances use lease. In the age of multimillion dollar imaging systems and highly sophisticated laboratories, I also support the joint use of certain equipment and services. Such an arrangement will improve the efficiency of both the VA and the academic health center.

I trust that you will find your visit informative and will depart as impressed as I am with the commitment of the people of Charleston to caring for our veterans. Thank you for your consideration of my recommendations and please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ernest F. Hollings". The signature is stylized with a large initial "E" and "H".

Ernest F. Hollings

EFH/jh

LINDSEY O. GRAHAM
SOUTH CAROLINA
(202) 224-5572

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 8, 2003

Mr. Charles Battaglia
CARES Commission
OO CARES
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20480

Dear Mr. Battaglia:

*(Please read the following statement during the appropriate time of the VA Atlanta Network
VISN 7 CARES Commission Hearing in Charleston, SC.)*

I regret that my schedule does not allow me to join you today to personally participate in this important discussion on the Department of Veterans Affairs health care infrastructure.

Throughout our history, the men and women of the United States Armed Forces have repeatedly been called to duty to protect and preserve the freedoms and liberties that we all hold so close. Without the service and sacrifice of these brave men and women, none of you may be sitting here today.

As our Veteran population changes, their health care needs are dramatically different from that of only a few years ago. As a result, modifications will have to be made throughout the VA to adapt to the needs and requirements of our patriots and their families. Our military family does not hold back during times of conflict, and therefore we should not hold back on them when they need care. I strongly believe that the VA should have the best facilities, the best medical providers, and access to the latest advancements in treatments and prescriptions.

Being a Veteran myself and a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, let me assure each of you that caring for the needs of Veterans and their families is one of my highest priorities. I will do all that is within my power to guarantee that our Nation's heroes receive the best possible health care, and that it is received in a timely manner.

Again, I regret that I am unable to join you today, but please feel free to contact me if I may ever be of assistance to any of you in the future.

Sincerely,



Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator